

1877

GOD IN GOVERNMENT.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Executive and Legislative Departments

OF THE

GOVERNMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS,

AT THE

ANNUAL ELECTION,

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 1877.

BY REV. B. F. HAMILTON.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SENATE, January 29, 1877.

Ordered, That a special committee of three be appointed to present the thanks of the Senate to the Rev. B. F. Hamilton for the able and appropriate sermon preached before the legislative and executive departments of the government on the third instant, and request a copy of the same for publication.

SENATE, January 30, 1877.

Adopted, and Messrs. Moors of Franklin, Brown of Essex, and Sherman of Middlesex are appointed the committee.

S. N. GIFFORD, *Clerk*.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

SENATE CHAMBER, BOSTON, February 1, 1877.

DEAR SIR:—By a vote of the Senate, passed January 30, the undersigned were appointed a committee to express the thanks of the Senate to you for the able and appropriate sermon preached before the executive and legislative departments of the government on the 3d of January, and to request a copy for publication.

The above vote and request it gives us pleasure to communicate.

Your obedient servants,

J. F. MOORS.
L. H. SHERMAN.
HAYDN BROWN.

REV. B. F. HAMILTON.

BOSTON HIGHLANDS, February 12, 1877.

DEAR SIR:—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of the first instant, conveying the vote of thanks passed by the Senate for the sermon preached by me before the executive and legislative departments of the state government on January 3, 1877, and the request for a copy of the same for publication.

In response to the favor so kindly expressed, I herewith forward the desired manuscript.

Your obedient servant,

B. F. HAMILTON.

TO HON. J. F. MOORS, L. H. SHERMAN, HAYDN BROWN,
Committee of Senate.

SERMON.

LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT UNTO THE HIGHER POWERS. FOR THERE IS NO POWER BUT OF GOD: THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD. . . . THEY ARE GOD'S MINISTERS. . . . *Rom. xiii. 1 and 6.*

True loyalty implies service. Man, be he peasant, prince, or king, must have a master. However great his powers, there are others greater; however high his authority, it is never the highest. Like the stars, he rules best by obeying; like the moon, he must yield his glory to another, though a sea of applauding humanity follow in his wake.

To whom, then, belongs this meed of highest honor? Whence comes the primal right of any to rule? Where rests the ultimate will for all to heed? These are queries as old as history, as intricate as society, as vital as government itself; to the solving of which reason has loaned its bright intuitions, experience has set its lamp of reflection, war has waged its sharp arbitrament. And yet the answers given have been as varied as

the ends sought or the means employed to reach them.

According to one theorist, *power* gives the seal to all authority; another affirms that wealth, wisdom, or executive tact brings the right to rule; another believes in the "divine right" of kings, and knows no stable throne outside the royal line; while another still centres absolute sovereignty in the social compact, and prays that a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," may not perish from the earth.

This last theory, born of reason, and bred in the school of patriotism,—the bane of dynasties and the pest of tyrants, but the glory of republics and the pet of freemen,—so dear to every American heart, and so fraught with blessings for this goodly land, is, nevertheless, liable to perversion, and needs the check of wise conditions.

In our strong revulsion from hereditary rule and arbitrary power, with an intense hate of everything that binds conscience or limits constitutional rights, with an inborn love of civil liberty and social equality, there is danger of overestimating the power of the popular will, and of robbing God that man may rule.

As a check to this tendency, and in explanation

of the true relations between divine and human authority, the passage of Scripture of which our text is a part has great significance. In this inspired "Magna Charta" the rights of the citizen, the State, and the great Sovereign are fully guaranteed through a harmonious adjustment of the less to the greater, and of all to the greatest. Civil law is here honored by divine sanctions; obedience is made a matter of conscience; tribute is put down as a test of loyalty; penalties are applied on the principle of benevolence; right government is ranked as a religious duty; those that legislate, and those that execute, are ordained alike as with the laying on of apostolic hands, the ministers of Him who rules supreme.

Being permitted to address those thus highly commissioned, I can think of no more fitting theme for discussion in this grave presence than *God in Government*, or the *Theocratic Element in the Social Compact*.

I. As a premise to the conclusions that may follow, we shall need to consider: first, the absolute *supremacy* of the Most High, and his inherent right to *regulate* all government.

Jehovah has never yet abdicated his throne in

favor of any royal line, or bound his will by the vote of a majority. Deity cannot give his prerogatives to humanity. The finite must be limited by the Infinite; the created, by the Creator. No model outranks its maker; no shadow is independent of the light; no system has an organic unity distinct from ultimate principles; no forms of life determine their own functions, or set bounds to their own existence. This has been done for them by Him who is the life, on a plan devised before the foundations of the world were laid.

If, then, man has liberty, it must be in law; if he has authority, it is delegated, not developed; if he rules, it is as by sufferance, and that not of his subjects beneath simply, but also of his Sovereign above.

From this germinal truth all good governments spring. Man rules *himself* best when he heeds the restraints of the higher law. His free agency, although involving a choice between right and wrong, is yet conditioned by moral motives, which make it imperative that he do the right. Conscience will give him no peace until he obeys her mandates. That inner sense of duty which the elder Adams called "the minister plenipotentiary of God Almighty in the breast," may not be

slighted, save at the cost of anarchy in the heart. When our first parents turned a deaf ear to that authoritative voice, it was only to hear the din of discordant emotions, and feel the friction of opposing motives. No more placid repose in conscious worthiness for them; no more complacent meditations unmarred by sharp compunctions; no more free activity, save in the tether of chafing restraints. Primeval blessedness was bartered when righteous law was broken. Paradise became a pandemonium at the loss of moral rectitude.

Yet the point to be emphasized here, is the fact that the first transgression was a *social* sin against a system *divinely* arranged. There was collusion in guilt between the unhappy pair. Society, as well as the individual, suffered by the revolt in Eden. God's government, as well as man's moral nature, was involved in that lapse from loyalty. He framed the constitution of the garden Commonwealth. He adjusted the legal relations between the two citizens and himself. He put the permissions, the prohibitions, and the penalties in the first unwritten statutes. He devised the marital laws, the secular industries, and the civil service of the primeval state.

So when families were multiplied on the earth,

and the *patriarchal* system became the generally accepted government of the race, the old Hebrew sheik still sat at the feet of the heavenly King. His word was law throughout the tribe, for it was thought to be the echo of the omnipotent voice. Abraham was chosen the father of the faithful because it was known that he would order his children and his household after him in the way of the Lord.

Moses was a representative of Jehovah, as well as of Israel, when the Sinaitic code was adopted. The judges, too, were revered as sacred persons, because they "inquired of the Lord" before they gave their decisions, or attempted to execute judgment and justice for the people.

Samson's strength, Gideon's courage, Samuel's wisdom, were confessedly dependent upon other than human inspiration for their more fervid moods.

Nor was the royal sceptre taken up save by divine permission. Though Israel's petulant demands for a temporal king betrayed a lack of faith in the theocracy, and were treated as a grave breach of covenant obligations, yet Jehovah, in yielding to the wish of his fickle subjects, still retained the right to designate their future sover-

eign, to induct him into office by the hand of his chosen servant, and to shape the very framework of the new government. Thus we read that when the son of Kish was anointed king at Mizpeh, Samuel, not Saul, "told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord," as if in formal acknowledgment of the fact that law and sovereignty alike lose their sacredness when dis severed from the Holy of holies. Hence the ark of the covenant was always taken as a symbol of Israel's nationality. The tables of stone, and the rod that budded, were placed side by side as visible tokens of an invisible word and power working together for the public weal. Prophets were associate with kings to check their excesses and keep them in mind of their dependence upon Heaven for success.

And this *theocratic* idea is operative, to some extent at least, in all good government to-day; not in form, but in fact; not as a recorded statute or representative functionary, perhaps, but as a permeating influence and a moulding principle. The rod which budded is lost, and the prophet's voice is silent, but the word and power which they symbolized are absolute still. This the great Edmund Burke admitted in his logical argument

against arbitrary human rule, when he exclaimed, "No man can lawfully govern *himself* according to his *own* will; much less can one person be governed by the will of another without enmity towards God!"

This was once preached to the House of Lords by Bishop Butler, in the expressive phrase, "Reverence and submission will, at best, be very precarious if they be not founded upon a sense of authority, being *God's* ordinance; and the subordinations of life a *providential* appointment of things." And the same thing is virtually conceded by the present head of that government as often as she subscribes herself "Victoria, by the *grace* of *God*, Queen of Great Britain"; or stamps her coined wealth with the *Deo gratias*; or sits upon her throne carved with the motto, "*Deus, major columna*" (God, the strongest pillar).

Nor did our fathers leave the theocratic idea behind them when they crossed the sea to found this free Commonwealth. They turned their backs upon musty traditions and forced ceremonials and arbitrary dogmas, but gave their hearts to the eternal doctrines, the abounding grace, and the blessed liberty with which Christ makes men free. Instead of burying their faith in the ceremonies of

dead forms, they brought it to life in the various activities of the body politic. Instead of uniting church and state in law, they were made one only in spirit, each being subject to the other just so far as both are obedient to God. Hence that social compact, solemnized by prayer "in the presence of God," on board the Mayflower; hence that convention of pious planters at New Haven, in 1639, "for the establishment of such civil order as might be most pleasing unto God"; hence those early instructions of the Legislature to its committee appointed to frame laws for this Commonwealth, "Let them be as *near the law of God as possible*"; hence that decision of the supreme court, that Christianity "was recognized by the people as a fundamental and essential part of the Constitution"; hence these sacred institutions protected by law, these solemn oaths taken at the door of official station, these commissioned chaplains in civil and military service, this union in worship by the representatives of the State in keeping of a long-established custom.

Aye, the common law of the land requires a devout recognition of Deity. Revered precedent ranks religious faith among the cardinal virtues. Even secular history reserves for her brightest

pages the pious acts of her great men: Washington on his knees at Valley Forge; General Hans Von Zieten declining to dine with Frederick the Great that he might sit at the table of the Lord, and, afterwards, when rallied therefor, rebuking that infidel sovereign for his profanity with the brave words, "If you undermine the Christian faith, you undermine at the same time the welfare of the state"; William, Prince of Orange, quelling the fears of his followers, because no foreign power had espoused his cause, with the assuring remark, "*I have made a close alliance with the King of kings*"; Solomon, stepping down from his gilded throne, and laying aside his bejewelled crown, to ask for that wisdom by which kings reign and princes decree justice;—such, I say, are the royal acts which bear the palm in the records of the past, and prove their authors worthy to rule.

II. It being admitted, then, that human authority is subject to the divine will, it follows, logically, that civil *legislation* should be made to match God's law. Everything good in this world is fashioned after a divine model. Wisdom, order, justice, benevolence, if genuine, are but finite

features of the Infinite Spirit. True science, and all correct systems of philosophy, may be reduced to ultimate rules that are eternal: mathematics to axioms, ethics to principles, social science to inalienable rights. Liberty lay hid in law, like the rainbow in light, or the telegraph in electricity, long ages before Plato theorized, or Leonidas fought, or Lycurgus legislated. Man does not *create* government; simply *constructs* it. He cannot make rights; only discover, apply, and protect them. The legislator, as well as the scientist and theologian, is in search of rules written by the finger of God, and must, like them, at times go back of traditions and precedents and popular preferences, to read the law as engrossed in the constitution of things, or brought to light on the sacred page.

One of the earliest recorded discussions of our colonial fathers was on the question, "Whether the Scriptures do hold forth a perfect rule for the direction and government of all men in all duties or not." How that question was decided may be inferred from the fact that, later, the Legislature of this State appointed a committee to frame laws for the Commonwealth, with the instruction, "Let them be as near the law of God as possible."

Can a state thus founded safely change its base while the superstructure is being reared? Will a statute-book thus begun seem genuine, if its later editions be but dim types of the original? Ought not each act and resolve and legal restraint to be as really the outcome of the same primal truth, as tendrils are the growth of the vine, or silken threads the product of the living chrysalis?

There *is* a development theory true alike of law and life, whose bioplasm is the breath of God, and whose testing lens is the revealed Word. The same power that gave free agency to the individual, and sovereignty to the state, has placed the Bible in the hands of the people, "that they may learn how to wear the crown." America's "princes," like Israel's poet-king, will walk at liberty only as they seek God's precepts. To turn from these in private life; to bar them out from the public schools; to belie their authority in official acts or legislative resolves,—is to ape the folly of that national convention which decreed the Sabbath void and the Bible a lie, only to hasten the horrors of the French Revolution. Wise statesmanship, like good seamanship, never slights the celestial chart.

It is said that the springs about Naples are wont

to rise to a higher level in their cisterns so often as Vesuvius threatens an eruption. Analogy suggests that this fountain of truth, if allowed to well up in the popular heart and estimation, would both warn against and drown out those pent-up passions which threaten the nation's safety.

III. And this, again, reminds us that divine *motives*, as well as divine methods, should characterize human legislation. Among those which might be mentioned is *benevolence*, at the head of the list. That regal virtue, which dominates the counsels, the orders, and the acts of the heavenly Sovereign, may well occupy a ruling place in the deliberations of this "great and general court." "The greatest good to the greatest number," is a fitting motto for all in authority to adopt. Government is designed for the public weal, and not for personal emolument or party ends. Official station, instead of being the "head centre" for plotting ambition or political rings, is the nation's watch-tower, whence should sound forth to the ear of a listening people the frequent assurance, "all is well." Those thus highly exalted, if, indeed, made a little lower than the angels, may yet vie with them in heralding "peace on earth, good-will

toward men." Both are ministers of God, and the honored mission of each is to help restore lost harmony to our contending race. Human society, like the vaulted canopy, is full of discordant elements and perturbing forces, which need the gravity of law to hold them in check; and he who unfolds a practical system of rules by which the multitudes may be controlled, is a greater benefactor to the race than the writer of the *Principia*.

It is a *gracious* work to govern well; an act of mercy to keep the vicious in check. Some men are like horses, safe only when held in by the curb-bit of legal restraint. Society has its ups and downs like rugged scenery, with low streams to be bridged over and highways to be walled in, that the incautious traveller may not come to grief. Without this civil engineering and legal macadamizing, every moral thoroughfare will be bisected with those troublesome "private ways" which bear the ugly signal, "Dangerous passing." It is as much an act of benevolence to fence out vice, as to farm virtue; to hold back the froward, as to hurry forward the faithful. True philanthropy, no less than sound theology, sanctions wholesome restraints and wise penalties. The civil code, like the moral law, may and ought to embody the spirit

of love. Let this silken thread, then, run through the leaves of the statute-book; this holy oil lubricate the wheels of government. Let "justice be tempered with mercy," and force be balanced by compassion. Let the law which checks license foster liberty, and the hand that locks up the prisoner open some door of hope to the discharged convict.

It is well for the vicious to know that law is executed in the interest of virtue, and not for the sake of vengeance; that immorality is both a private and a public bane; that ignorance is discouraged by the State alike for its own safety and for the well-being of its subjects; that neither bigotry nor infidelity will be allowed to blight our free schools, to undermine our holy Sabbaths, or to bar the doors of our Christian sanctuaries, since upon these cherished institutions the Commonwealth itself is builded; and "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

2. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that wise legislation is closely wedded to *equity* and *justice*. Government, like grace, should aim to clothe all its subjects with the garments of righteousness. Law, like cohesion, will occasion least friction and closest union when it touches each member of the

body politic with well-adjusted pressure. In a land like this, where the ends of the earth meet together, all tribes, all tongues, and all tastes comingling; the Celt seeking fellowship with the Gaul; the sons of Ham claiming fraternity with the children of Japheth; ancient Egypt and modern Europe owning allegiance to Young America,—the land of *convocation*, not of dispersion,—here a common polity, as well as a common language, is needed to prevent a Babel confusion. A democracy, not less than a theocracy, demands that the balances of justice be delicately poised; that the rule of right be accurately marked. Any attempts to shade it down to the color line; to give it a sectional bias or a social distinction; to make it rigid or elastic, crooked or straight, according as the subjects tested are high or low, rich or poor, weak or strong,—tend to warp the very framework of our government, and give the tower of our national strength a Pisa tip. Trickery in politics is treachery towards patriotism. Dishonesty is disloyalty. Illegal voting is public vandalism. The people who allow the sacred right of suffrage to be tampered with unchallenged,—cliques to control caucuses, money to buy place, lobbies to dictate

legislation, murderers to make majorities,—will, one day, want a Cavaignac to sweep their mob-thronged streets with cannon, or a Bismarck to crush out their corrupt rings with his iron grasp. Providence has compassion upon those who *struggle against* wrong, but a rod for such as *wink at sin*. He cares little which party comes to power, so they really mean “reform”; or what candidate gains the electoral vote, so he has clean hands and a pure heart; but woe to the man or to the party that attains honor through fraud, or place by force. “Justice, justice! woe betide us everywhere when for this reason, or for that, we fail to do justice! No beneficence, benevolence, or other virtuous contribution will make good the want. In the name of Heaven, give us justice, and we live; give us only counterfeits of it, or succedanea for it, and we die.” So cries England’s keenest critic, and so responds America’s truest patriots, with a loud Amen.

3. Finally, that government is most benign and just which aims *to elevate and instruct its subjects*. The state, hardly less than the family, the school, or the church, is a public educator; and that, not through its institutions alone, but by its acts, resolves, and avowed policy as well.

It is to be expected that a good government will foster pure literature and sound learning; but it is sometimes forgotten that the legislative hall is a kind of public school-room; that the General Statutes are a moral text-book for the people to study; and the character of their representatives, "living epistles, known and read of all men." Some men know little of virtue, save as they see it illustrated by their superiors. Their consciences are aroused only by the "shalls" and the "shall nots" of the law. They are ambitious of little else than to escape the penalties of transgression. Spartan youth could commit theft without compunctions, for the laws which they were obliged to study rewarded cunning. It was not strange that the subjects of Charles the Second offered virtue and justice for sale, when their sovereign, insensible alike to honor and shame, was the highest bidder. The voluptuousness of the court of Louis XV. was the natural source of that infidelity and communism whose turbid streams so poisoned the social life of France a century ago. "Tell me what kind of man governs a people," says Carlyle, "and you tell me with much exactness what the net sum-total of social worth in that people has for some time been."

Moral, like atmospheric, currents, are determined in high places. Subjects submit themselves in more ways than one to their rulers. Their judgment, their conscience, and their social life are often shaped by the habits of their chosen representatives. A few men set the fashions, make the laws, turn the currents of popular thought and feeling for each generation to follow. How important, then, that these *leaders* of the people follow the right; that the beacon-lights shine forth; that the sceptre of power point towards the star of truth!

Many weak and unfortunate souls need the aid of *authority* to keep them from despondency. Seventy-seven thousand illiterate adults are to-day invoking the wisdom of this State to enlighten them in their ignorance. Four thousand three hundred and forty convicts seek the mercy of the State while justice is being meted out to them. Ten thousand helpless inebriates are praying for the power of the State to defend them from their heartless tempters. An untold number of indigent, aimless, incompetent persons are waiting for the benevolent hand of the State to save them from vicious habits, by helping them to honest employment. Industrial schools are better than

penitentiaries; state farms are cheaper than state prisons. The civil, like the moral, law, may be a schoolmaster, to lead men, if not to Christ, yet to higher aims and more useful lives.

Ministers in the temple of justice, hardly less than ministers at the altar of religion, have a part in every great reform, and the authority of the former will give emphasis to the preaching of the latter. We of the pulpit welcome you of the bench, the bar, and the legislative hall as co-laborers in the high calling of promoting the public weal, and gladly extend the right hand of fellowship in token of brotherhood in service.

There needs to be a closer union and a more active sympathy on the part of all who aim to promote the general good.

The co-operative industries have had a grand triumph in the success of the centennial exhibition just closed. A combination of loyal arms crushed out treason from our national domain, and conquered, we trust, a permanent peace. Would not a *like union* of *all* moral forces ensure an equally glorious victory over the powers of evil? Will not the fruits of virtue and the ornaments of grace abound more richly in this fair land when the well-meaning, in every department of service, enter into

righteous competition to exhibit the beautiful, the true, and the good in *character* everywhere?

The sweet poet's song is also the true patriot's prayer:—

“For art and labor met in truce,
For beauty made the bride of use,
We thank thee; but, withal, we crave
The austere virtues strong to save,
The honor proof to place or gold,
The manhood never bought nor sold.

“Oh make thou us, through centuries long,
In peace secure, in justice strong;
Around our gift of freedom draw
The safeguards of thy righteous law;
And, cast in some diviner mould,
Let the new cycle shame the old.”

This plea for the noblest motives in government will, I am sure, be received in the spirit of kindly consideration by His Excellency the Governor, whose public proclamations and official bearing well illustrate the meaning of much that has been said. Massachusetts is to be congratulated that the noble line of her Chief Magistracy is being perpetuated, and that the chair once occupied by men like Adams and Briggs and Andrew is graced so well to-day.

“Ask well who is your chief governor,” says one, “for around him men like to him will infalli-

bly gather." This prophecy will be verified, I doubt not, in the history of the Legislature now convened. To His Honor, the Lieutenant-Governor, to the honorable Council, Senate, and House of Representatives, I offer the respectful salutations of the place and the hour, with the prayer that the Spirit of all grace will guide them in their deliberations, and lead them to that wisdom and knowledge which are the stability of our times.